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PROGRAM NEW YORK TIMES INSIGHT

STATION

DATE April 15, 1971 7:30PM

CITY New York, N.Y.

CPYRGHT

CLIFTON DANIEL: The last word this evening is about the CIA and the public. For the first time since he became head of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1966, Richard Helms made a public speech yesterday. He appeared before the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington.

Among other things, Mr. Helms said the nation must to a degree take it on faith that we too, meaning we in the CIA, are honorable men devoted to her service. I hope Mr. Helms will forgive me if I express a little skepticism. I accept the fact that he is an honorable man. More than that he is an intelligent, efficient, and effective public official and an honest and candid one as well. So far as one can know he has improved the work of the Central Intelligence Agency and liquidated some of its more dubious enterprises. The fact remains, however, as Mr. Helms himself recognizes, that the mission of the CIA appears to many Americans in his words, "to be in conflict with some of the traditions and ideals of our society." It makes me nervous, it